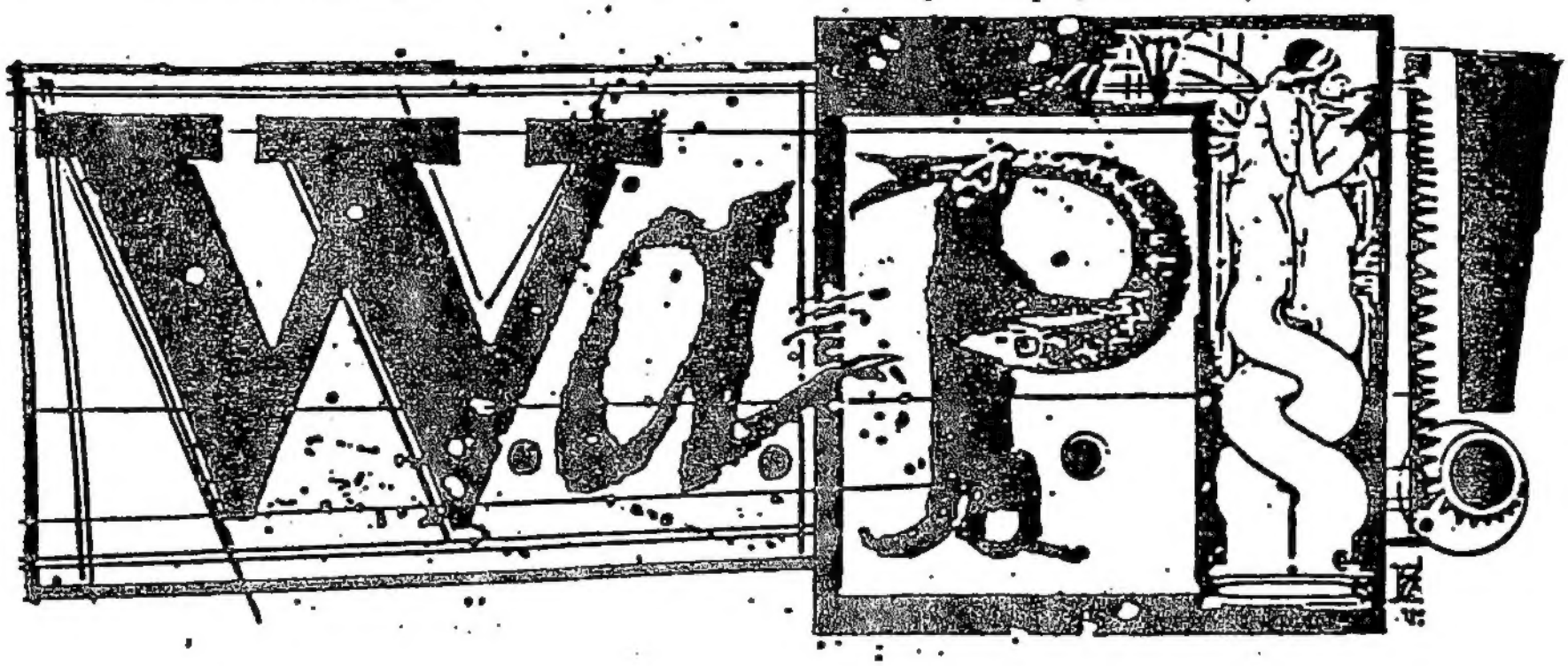
No. 7 December 1988 - Jaunary 1989



The Secret War of Buddy Saunders

page 3

OKAY, PARDNERS... IT'S THE LAST 'ROUND-UP...
WHOEVER GAVE "THE ZETA BEAM" TO THE PORN PUBLISHERS... ONE STEP FORWARD! NOW!
I'M YOUR BUDDY!
LONE STAR
TWITCH!
CHING CHING

W O R D S & P I C T U R E S

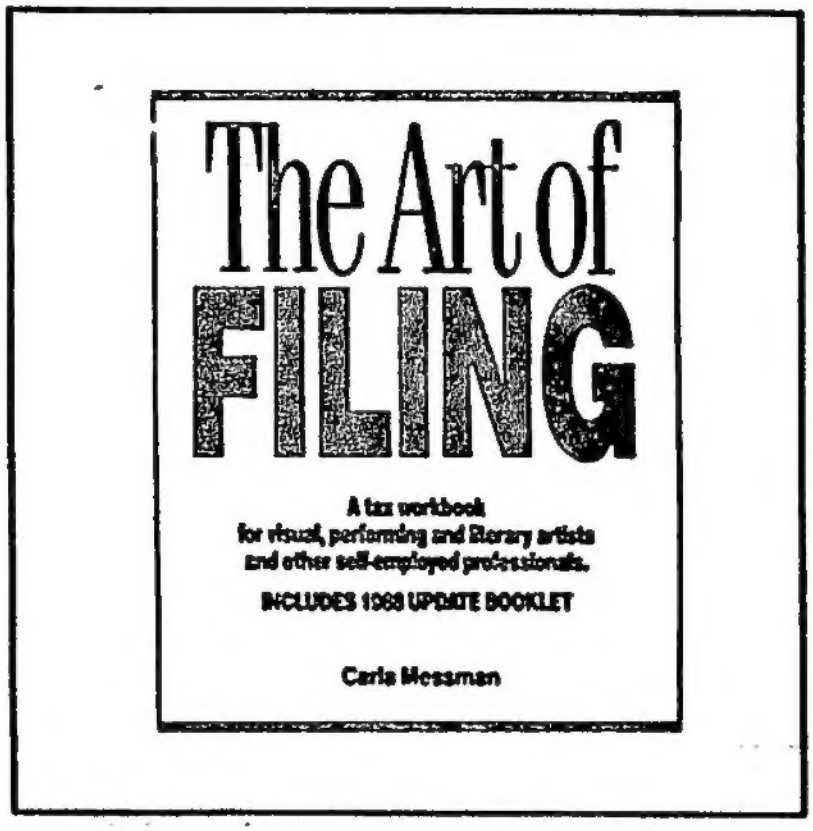
Joyce Brabner:

Good News About Taxes

The Technical Corrections Act, which was just recently signed into law, includes the exemption of freelance artists, writers, and photographers from the uniform capitalization provision (Section 263[A]) of the Tax Reform Act of 1986. This means that freelancers can continue to deduct expenses as they are incurred, as a cost of doing business.

This win reflects good organizing on the part of the individuals and groups who formed coalitions such as Artists For Tax Equity (AFTE). A staff member at Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (VLA) in New York told me, with some amusement, that "Artists and writers are always difficult to organize. Most are very independent people, who are used to working alone. It's always seemed impossible to get any number of them to agree to anything. This was the first time we've seen so many come out in support of an issue, because so much was at stake."

There are still some confusing changes that will affect how we do our 1988 taxes. (For example, the tax now prohibits a business deduction for the basic monthly cost of a home telephone.) This should help: *The Art Of Filing* by Carla Messman is "a tax workbook for visual, performing, and literary artists and other self-employed professionals." It's great -- I have an arts management background, and as far as I know, this book is one-of-a-kind. *The Art Of Filing* now also includes a 32-page supplement, which covers the new 1988 rules.



Even if you have a good accountant, you should own this book -- and show it to that person. If your accountant waves it away, change accountants. Very few accountants are clued in to how the business of freelance artists and writers differs from other professionals. If you want to increase your chances of finding an accountant with an arts background, call your state or local arts council. Ask if an organization such as Volunteer Accountants for the Arts operates in your area. VAA usually charges nothing, or by sliding scale. In some areas, they only assist non-profit organizations. Hopefully, by now you already earn enough to pay what a VAA-experienced accountant is worth. An accountant who has donated services that help other artists or writers not only has an edge over H.R. Block, s/he also deserves your business.

If you're on your own, or want to check the bookkeeping system you set up when you first changed over from "hobbyist" to professional, *The Art Of Filing* and the 1988 supplement will take you through receipts and recordkeeping, setting up books, reporting requirements, forms, schedules, federal returns, state returns, and most questions. If you want to reduce the cost of an accountant, go through the book first, as far as you can. That way you'll be paying only for expertise and qualified reassurance, not the numbers-crunching you could have done yourself. *The Art Of Filing* contains samples of income and expense records (different ones for painters, writers and graphic designers), and examples of completed tax forms.

Income and deductions are year-round decisions, which is why you should be looking at this book in January instead of April. A *1988 Update Booklet* alone costs $4.95 + $1.50 postage & handling, while *The Art Of Filing* (book *and* the 1988 supplement) costs $12.95 + $1.50 postage & handling, if ordered from the Resources and Counseling division of United Arts, the Minnesota non-profit arts organization that publishes the 180-page book and the new supplement.

I called Dean Mullaney, and he has agreed to let Eclipse Comics serve as a clearinghouse for the book, so freelancers can get copies of *The Art Of Filing* at a discount. Eclipse is ordering 26 copies, which will bring the cost per book down to $9.07. If they have to mail it to you, add $1.50 postage. And it's deductible.

United Arts
429 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
St. Paul, MN 55102
1988 Update Booklet: $6.45
Book + 1988 Update: $14.45
(Minnesota residents add 6% tax)

Eclipse Comics
"The Art Of Filing Special Offer"
P.O. Box 1099
Forestville, CA 95436
(707) 887-1521
Book + 1988 Update: $9.07
(with $1.50 postage: $10.57)

[*The editorial board of WAP! heartily recommends that all freelancers get a copy of this book.*]

John Ostrander:

The Secret Wars of Buddy Saunders

I have received copies of inter-office memos (called *The Zeta Beam*) involving Buddy Saunders' Lone Star Comics which I've decided to share with the rest of the industry. [Editor's note: the memos John refers to are reproduced in the accompanying box.] They were sent to me because one specifically affects a book I write but I find the attitudes behind them offensive not only to the professional but to the customer, involving both arrogance and a certain hypocrisy on the part of Mr. Saunders. I held back mentioning them until I knew for certain that my book, *Wasteland*, which Mr. Saunders takes direct exception to, was going to be cancelled quite simply because I don't want the issue seen as an attempt by me to boost sales. I read them on a Censorship Panel at a convention in Texas over Thanksgiving weekend, which caused quite a stir.

"[Mr. Saunders] may have the right to expect his staff to comply with his directives, but he has no right to expect them to "support and understand" a policy that tells them, essentially, to lie to a customer.
— John Ostrander

I should state from the beginning that I am not questioning Mr. Saunders' right to sell or not sell whatever he pleases. That's not, so far as I am concerned, the issue here. What bothers me is his attitude towards his customers and his staff. He may have the right to expect his staff to comply with his directives, but he has no right to expect them to "support and understand" a policy that tells them, essentially, to lie to the customer.

I am also at a loss to understand how Mr. Saunders can object on essentially moral grounds to a comic and then tell his managers to lie to the customers as to why the comic is not available. If he feels that DC is "pandering" with its books, why is he selling them at all? The answer to this, of course, is that -- if he didn't -- his customers would go elsewhere and he is not about to risk that. If he thinks DC's books are smut, then he is a smut dealer to sell them at all.

I find incredible his instructions to "not say that we have dropped the title as this is likely only to generate further questions and complaint." I bet it would and we can't have that, can we? Why, you might think this was America or something!

THE SAUNDERS MEMOS

These are the relevant paragraphs from The Zeta Beam, *the weekly memo from Buddy Saunders to his various stores. Each "sequence" number refers to a specific week. All paragraphs are taken from Section C of* The Zeta Beam. *We have taken care to reproduce all paragraphs exactly as they originally appeared; all typos are in the originals. All italics are ours.*

Zeta Beam Sequence No. 194, paragraph 2B - Because of Aardvark-Vanaheim polices that are not in the best interests of comics retailers, it is Lone Star's policy not to support this publisher beyond carrying *Cerebus*. No new Aardvark-Vanaheim titles will be carried by Lone Star unless and until we determine that doing so would be in our best long-term interests. Although we will continue to carry *Cerebus* so long as our distributor does (an agreement apparently has been reached between Aardvark and Diamond that resulted in Diamond deciding to continue offering *Cerebus*), I have no desire to promote or otherwise provide support of any sort that could result in the title gaining new readers. With this in mind, do not make *Cerebus* comic of the week, provide any special displays or promotions, etc. Individual employees may recommend *Cerebus* if they wish, but there will be no support provided by Lone Star. Please note that this or any other business policy established by Lone Star are not to be discussed with customers.

Zeta Beam Sequence No. 199, paragraph 12B - Do not make any DC comic Comic of the Week without first clearing it with me. It is Lone Star's position that DC Comics is acting in a less than responsible manner with regard to content in some general audience comics. I do not want any comic -- DC or otherwise -- made comic of the week if it cannot be offered to ALL customers. *NOTE: All policies such as these are NOT to be discussed in any way with customers or in the presence of customers.*

Zeta Beam Sequence No. 203, paragraph 4B - Lone Star's policy is not to promote any comic that contains graphic violence, crude language, sex, nudity, etc. if that comic is intended to be sold to minors, i.e. anyone younger than 18. Most super hero titles from DC now fall into this category along with some comics from many other publishers. As DC is the clear leader in the production of tasteless pandering, you are to make every effort to caution parents as to the inappropriate content their child is likely to encounter in most DC titles. To the best of

Equally incredible to me is his statement: "Which companies we choose to support and which we choose to withdraw support from is none of their business." I would suggest it is very much their business; a customer gives you their business, they keep you in business, and have a right to expect honest, fair treatment and service. I would further suggest that lying to them and misleading them, to demonstrate the contempt shown in these memos, is not the way to keep their business.

What makes all of this more sinister is that Buddy Saunders is not just another retailer. He has placed himself as a figure of authority in the industry; he has a position in the nomination of the Harvey Awards that, given the bias shown above to DC, causes me to wonder just how impartial those awards can be. If he will not disassociate himself from the Harveys, perhaps the Harveys should disassociate themselves from him. The other thing to consider is that this is what we know Buddy is doing. How much of the iceberg is not showing?

Whether Mr. Saunders' policies constitute an unfair restraint of trade is something that Bob Ingersoll or the lawyers at DC may want to explore. I do think that any customer of Lone Star, if they are told a certain DC title (or any other title, for that matter; one never knows when another book will violate Mr. Saunders' tender sensibilities) is not currently available or is delayed, may want to check with other retailers in the area.

And, perhaps, Mr. Saunders would care to rethink some of his policies.

THE SAUNDERS MEMO, cont'd from p. 3

your ability, shift younger readers to Marvel titles or other alternate publishers such as Gladstone. Promotional materials for DC titles such as posters, flyers, news items, etc. are NOT to be posted in your store without first being cleared by me. Additionally, no DC comic is to be made comic of the week without office clearance. In essence, our goal with regard to DC, is to meet the buying needs of our regulars while at the same time doing everything possible to avoid creating new DC readers. *As a Lone Star employee, your support and understanding of this effort is both expected and required.*

Zeta Beam Sequence No. 203 (no paragraph number) - We will no longer be carrying WASTELAND. Issue 11 goes beyond any reasonable standards of taste and provides more than enough justification for dropping it. *If a customer asks for this title, tell them you don't think you've received any, but do not say that we have dropped the title as this is likely only to generate further questions and complaint.*

Do not discuss the policies outlined above with our regulars. Which companies we choose to support and which we choose to withdraw support from is none of their business.

Steve Bissette:

A FOOTNOTE

John Ostrander has addressed the Lone Star stand with *Wasteland* and DC Comics; in the case of *Cerebus*, Buddy has unknowingly confirmed all of Dave's worst-case scenarios. I won't reiterate the Aardvark-Vanaheim/Diamond friction that Buddy is referring to in *The Zeta Beam*, beyond reminding you that Murphy and Zulli's *Puma Blues* became the bargaining chip in the conflict: if Dave did not allow distributors to handle the 500- page *High Society* collection, they would refuse to carry *Puma Blues*. Thus, Murphy and Zulli would have suffered in a situation they were in no way, shape, or form involved with until they were dragged into it as fish-bait. The standoff ended with Diamond correcting the situation, while Dave still withheld his *Cerebus* graphic novels from high-discount distribution channels, and dissolved Aardvark One International, Dave's separate publishing wing under which *Puma Blues* and, in October, *Taboo* were (to be) published. Dave's fear was that in the future a similar situation might develop again, with distributors or retailers threatening Dave's projects by attacking the unrelated Aardvark One International publications... and thank you, Buddy, for proving that Dave's instincts were correct. Both *Puma Blues* and *Taboo* would have suffered under your current terms, even as you attempt to repress interest in *Cerebus* beyond its current readership.

My cover cartoon may be satiric in nature, but I am *not* making fun of the situation or its ramifications for the Lone Star employees. I have no doubt that the employee who was upset with Lone Star's latest methods of (dare I call it) censorship, upset enough to pass the relevant pages on to writer John Ostrander... well, I have no doubt he or she will be called on the carpet for their "crime" and fired. [The employee has been fired.] I'd like to think Buddy Saunders wouldn't do such a thing, but given the tone, instructions, and contractual nature of his behind-closed-doors communiques (*Zeta Beam* requires the employees' signatures to confirm their having "read and understood all items covered"), I fear for the worst.

Besides, I'm sure Buddy feels that this is none of our business.

He's done his damnedest to make sure it was none of our business.

Oh, but it is. It surely is.

A Few Words from Some Tired and Cranky Editors

Okay, so we're late. We've all been plagued by heavy workloads, various diseases, and personal responsibilities -- and then the holiday season completely screwed things up. We never had so many complications all at once before, we weren't prepared to handle them, and *WAP!* suffered for it. The next issue will come out on February 1, and then, a little wiser and a little better prepared for the next onslaught, we're back on a monthly schedule. Our apologies to our readers.

The questions we've gotten lately (especially from those who weren't around for the first couple of issues) indicate there are a few things that are still not generally understood about *WAP!*, so we'd like to take this opportunity to address them.

Q: What is WAP!?

A: *WAP!* is a forum for freelancers to express their views and to find out what's going on in the industry. We — Steve Gerber, Steven Grant, and Frank Miller, *WAP!*'s founders and editorial board — realized there was nowhere that professional freelancers in the comic book industry could express their viewpoints, and almost nowhere to learn vital information that would allow them to make informed decisions about their dealings in the industry. That's what *WAP!* is intended to provide.

Q: A lot of these matters are things that properly ought to be settled between an editor and a freelancer, not exposed in a public forum. What business is it of WAP!?

A: Mistreatment of one freelancer is the business of all freelancers. "Codes of silence" exist to support power structures and allow abuses to continue. In comics, they have consistently worked against the freelancer. Individual settlements may help individual freelancers (though, too often, those settlements have consisted of the editor or publisher getting everything and the freelancer going away empty-handed), but public exposure of problems can help form policies to protect *all* freelancers.

Q: Why does WAP! *talk about "freelancers" instead of "artists" or "cartoonists?"*

A: Because we believe that's the most accurate description of our readership. As we've said before, "creator" and "cartoonist" are artistic distinctions. "Freelancer" is an economic distinction. A freelancer (in our profession) is anyone who makes income from the creation of comics but who isn't a salaried employee of a comic book company. This includes people who do everything on their books and publish their own work, along with writers, artists, writer-artists, letterers and colorists. It doesn't include editors, publishers, or production staff of comic book companies, even if those people also work in the creative end of comics. If an editor writes a comic book, he's a staff writer, not a freelancer, no matter *what* the company chooses to call him.

Q: Is WAP! *advocacy journalism?*

A: Insofar as it's journalism, sure. We look at developments in the comics industry from a freelancer's point of view, and we advocate the paramount role of the freelancer and the creator in determining the future of the medium.

Q: Are the people on the editorial board journalists?

A: Not hardly. We're just freelancers like you. We haven't got the time to be "journalists," or dig up and research hot stories. We get our material from other freelancers, all of whom are a lot closer to the action than we are. We *do* check out our stories as best as we can, but we aren't journalists by any stretch of the imagination. If we miss stories, it's because we haven't been told about them. If you know of something you think ought to be printed in *WAP!*, tell us about it. Don't assume we already know.

Q: Does WAP! *have an attitude problem?*

A: We have an attitude, sure. But it's not *our* problem.

Q: But WAP! *takes a militant view of the freelancer's role in comics.*

A: No, *the members of the editorial board* have a somewhat militant viewpoint. *WAP!* is open to all viewpoints, as long as they're the viewpoints of freelancers. We welcome discussion and argument. If *WAP!* has had a predominant viewpoint, that's because the editorial board has written the bulk of the material. As other freelancers become involved with the writing of *WAP!*, the magazine will reflect their viewpoints as well.

Again, we welcome the viewpoints of *all* freelancers.

Q: I don't agree with WAP!*'s attitude on a certain issue, but I don't want to be ridiculed for expressing my opinion. I can just imagine being labelled an enemy of art...*

A: There are no standards of "political correctness" at *WAP!* (to the chagrin of some people who've complained about *that*). If anyone's going to label you, it won't be us, and we're not going to ridicule *any* freelancer, whether we agree with him or not. *WAP!* realizes there's a wide spectrum of opinion among the freelance community. But it's up to *you* to state your case. If you're waiting for us to make your case for you, you're liable to wait a long time.

Q: Steve Gerber has connections to Eclipse, and Steven Grant is close to First Comics. You almost never mention Eclipse or First in your pages, while you print lots of negative stories about DC and Marvel. Is WAP! *protecting First and Eclipse?*

A: Nope. We love to bite the hands that feed us. The truth is that lots of people rush to us with stories about Marvel and DC, but no one tells us any stories about Eclipse or First (or most other smaller companies). Instead, we get people complaining to other people, who

then talk to us, about how we never print Eclipse or First stories. If you have gripes against -- or good news for freelancers about -- *any* company, this is your place to air them. We can't print stories we never get.

Q: Isn't it hypocritical for WAP! *to complain about comics publishers screwing freelancers when* WAP!*'s own publisher is getting rich off the newsletter?*

A: There are two misconceptions here. First, no one makes *any* money off *WAP!*. Not the publisher and not the editorial board. All the subscription money goes into the publication and mailing of the newsletter, and quite a bit of money comes out of individual pockets on top of it, to pay for things like long-distance phone calls. If we added in *those* expenses, we'd probably be running in the red. As it is now, we're about breaking even.

Second, we're strapped with language that doesn't really fit. Brad Munson is the publisher, true, but in our terminology the publisher is the person who does all the shit work so the rest of us don't have to. (And isn't that the way it ought to be?) Brad's the guy who lays out the magazine [in consultation with us], shleps it to the printer, picks it up, handles the mailing, puts the stamps on, etc. If it wasn't for him, the damn thing would *never* come out.

Q: Wouldn't it be more fair if WAP! *took freelancers as well as editors, publishers, etc., to task?*

A: If you want to see freelancer-bashing, there are plenty of other places you can go. Go there. In our own clumsy way, we're trying to promote as much communication and goodwill among freelancers as possible.

BUT!

As long as you asked, there's one bit of bashing we'd like to do.

KNOCK IT OFF!

It's about time that everyone who's been living off the work of those who have gone before (for whatever reasons, whether nostalgia, obsession or editorial instruction) should get with the program. It's demeaning to the original creators, to the readers, to you and to the industry at large. Anyone capable of "borrowing" from the work of others is capable of original work. Of course, the companies promote this sort of "borrowing," but it's appalling how willing freelancers are to go along with it. We're not talking about taking over, say, *Captain America*. We're talking about taking over *Captain America* and doing nothing but pastiches of old Lee-Kirby comics.

In all cases, the originator(s) of a character or series should benefit from any continuations of that character or series. Until publishers can be forced in all cases to do the right thing, we ought to be taking care of our own as best we can. We're tired of all this crap about "homage" and "tribute" to other talents. Put your money where your mouth is. A Marvel artist who worked last year on a project that drew substantially from the work of Jack Kirby has sent 20% of his pay for the work to Kirby. Now *that's* a tribute. A writer currently handling the new adventures of Kirby characters at DC will be doing the same thing. *WAP!* encourages this behavior and wishes it would become a standard for the industry, instead of the borderline theft that passes for so much creative endeavor today.

Show some *pride*, huh?

Go somewhere else for your freelancer-bashing from now on.

Q: Is WAP! *feuding with* The Comics Journal?

A: Not as far as we're concerned. Sure, we've taken a couple shots at them (you can only have a loaded gun put in your hand so many times before you pull the trigger), but *WAP!* and *The Journal* serve different functions in the industry, and we don't see much overlap.

Q: Why is WAP! *so business-oriented? Why aren't there more articles involving matters of craft or art?*

A: Again, that's the orientation of the editorial board, an area we really feel has been downplayed to the detriment of the freelancer, and we've been doing most of the writing. Frankly, none of us feels comfortable telling other people how to create their comics. If someone wants to write articles on the subject of the art and the craft of comics, we'd be more than happy to publish them. We'd love to see discussion -- *real* discussion -- of those aspects of comics.

Likewise, maybe someone out there would like to tackle an article (or series of articles) on how various *technological* developments are affecting the freelancer. Do computers have a place in the coloring or design of comics? Are there good reasons for writers to abandon their typewriters in favor of word processors? How is it that no comics publisher, to our knowledge, has thought of using a computer bulletin board system to facilitate the delivery of scripts from out-of-town freelancers? (Virtually every animation studio in Los Angeles has or had one -- *including* Marvel Productions.) Articles on new tools for artists would also be appropriate for *WAP!* -- and, yes, we mean innovations in pencils, pens, brushes, and paper, as well as computers.

That's it for this time. If you have any other questions, please ask. See you in February.

New Deadlines

Due to the restructuring of *WAP!*'s schedule, returning us to monthly status as of February 1, 1989 (see *A Few Words From Some Tired And Cranky Editors* for details), there are new deadline dates. As we fully intend to have *WAP!* out at the beginning of every month from now on, these deadlines are firm:

WAP! 8: January 15

WAP! 9: February 15

WAP! 10: March 15

and so on. You get the idea. Thanks for your cooperation.

Mark Evanier:

An Article on Spec

(Uh, *not* on spec but... uh... well, you'll see...)

I am sick of getting this phone call.

"Uh, we have this wonderful idea for a new comic book [or comic strip]. It's really hot and we have offers coming out of the wazoo for it. Several publishers [or newspaper syndicates] have already expressed interest in it and all we need is an artist. I was told you know a number of them..."

(Let me interrupt a sec. This is M.E. again. I forgot to mention that the person calling me is invariably someone who has ventured little -- usually, not at all -- into the world of comic books or comic strips; usually, it's some clown who labors at an ad agency or something similar. Every week, sometimes more often, I get this call from someone insisting he has The Idea that will put "Peanuts" to shame: Buyers are camped out on his doorstep at this very moment with duffel bags of cash, begging for the property. Money by the tonweight looms ahead but for the tiny, insignificant obstacle of finding someone to *draw* the funnybook or strip at hand. And I needn't tell you what manure this all is. You're a Professional, after all, and you know that "several publishers have already expressed interest in it" invariably means that no publisher, no-how, nowhere, gives two shits for the project or has even heard of it.

(Let us rejoin our conversation, already in progress...)

"So what we need to find is an artist to work on this with us... we already have a lot of ideas and we just need someone who can flesh them out on paper."

("Flesh them out on paper." Rough translation: Do it all.)

My end of the conversation in this call is rote. I say, "Well, what kind of price range do you have in mind? If this strip looks to be this profitable, I suppose you want to hire the best artist around... which can run into money."

They say, "Money?"

I say, "Of course. Professional artists get paid for their work. This is a big project."

They say, "Uh, well, the artist will get a piece of the property down the line..."

I say, "Naturally. Payment for his work now and a piece of the property down the line. I know a couple of guys you might like to talk to... but they're pretty expensive..."

They say, "Uh, well, there's no money available right now. Once we get the samples in, everyone will get paid real well but..."

I interrupt, "You're not talking about asking some professional artist to work on spec, are you?"

They say, "Uh, well, uh, sort of..."

I say, "I thought you needed someone good. I thought this was an important project... millions of dollars..."

From there on, there's not much to say. But I would like to make the following points...

1. I have had *hundreds* of these calls over the years. Not a one of these callers has ever been heard of again, in or around the world of Comic Art.

2. Most of these callers are referred to me by some other professional who didn't have the time/guts to tell them the facts of life. And the next time one of you gives one of these people my number, I'm going to give *your* address to the Lyndon LaRouche people and tell them not to take No for an answer.

3. Professionals should never be asked to work on spec. And with this point comes...

3A. Amateurs who wish to become professionals should not work on spec, either.

Another definition, this of "working on spec." Working on spec is when you are asked to do something -- writing or drawing -- which, if they don't buy it, you're stuck with it. If I sit down and create and write up an original comic book, that's not working on spec. I can take that a number of places. It's mine, unencumbered by publishers or partners.

But if I sit down and write a Superman plot or a Thor script or even a new concept for Flash, that's working on spec. If the editor of the book says no, I'm pretty much stuck with it. It is my opinion (and the opinion of many) that a professional should *never* be asked to submit something of this order. You should *never* be asked to do work on their characters without some form of guaranteed compensation.

Now, of course, you *can* do it voluntarily... as a means of auditioning for a job. There's nothing unethical about deciding for yourself that you want to try a spec submission.

But it may be foolhardy. There's no way of calculating a batting average on it, but, in the last few years, the number of spec submissions of this kind (for characters the company already owns and controls) that have yielded paying work is somewhat microscopic. For that matter, the number that have been read or given serious consideration is pretty low. Practically anyone who has been around a comic book company's offices lately can tell tales of the awesome "slush pile" of submissions that sometimes mounts up... untouched by anyone in a genuine hiring capacity since that person is always too busy to tackle it. More often, the pile is shunted off to some Assistant to the Assistant who politely rejects the works of applicants, as often as not, no less professional

than he. There simply are not a lot of cases lately of spec work yielding the paying variety.

This discussion is not a new one. For the last few months, it has been ricocheting around the Writer's Exchange, a computerized bulletin board operated by one Steve Gerber. The conversation there, excerpts of which follow, is what prompted this article.

Things got off to a start when I posted a "blind" tale of a new comic book artist who had come to me with a query of ethics. He had done a story for a small comic publisher, on a "spec" assignment ("If everyone likes it, we'll buy it"), and then been told that his work was substandard and that he would not be paid. He came to me and asked if the publisher was in the right.

By doing the job on spec, the new kid had put himself in a wholly-vulnerable position. He had several weeks invested in the work and was now at the mercy of the publisher's whim. The publisher could suddenly decide he didn't want to publish the book at all... or he could offer the kid a "take-it-or-leave-it" lowball money offer for the work already completed... or any of a number of other alternatives. The publisher was at no risk but the kid stood to get stuck having done all that work on characters and a script that the publisher owned.

There were a great many extenuating circumstances to the matter which I put before the folks on Steve's board. Basically though, we concluded that the publisher was in the wrong. He had known *exactly* what the new artist would deliver and had seen the work in progress and not called a halt to it.

As part of our discussion, however, Nat Gertler posted a message about doing spec work. Nat is new to the field, a writer poised on the cusp of professional standing. He suggested a compromise move wherein the publisher would agree to give the artist another chance on another assignment. Many of us disagreed with Nat... and the debate was on...

***

Gertler: The solution that I proposed serves the purposes of both the publisher and the new artist (who, at this point, is probably as worried about getting published credit as he is more important than getting 100% going rate for every page done). The artist did the work on spec trying to get series work... this would give him series work. (I tend to be on the "wrong" side of comics industry issues, perhaps because I empathize a bit with the businessmen as well as the creators).

Steven Grant: This brings up another point -- never work on spec. If a publisher hires you to put x amount of work into a project, with payment contingent on his liking or being able to use the work, do not work on spec. Arrange a kill fee in advance. Publishers are there to take risks, they are not there to force other people to take risks for them...

Gertler: "Never work on spec" sounds like a good ideal, but it clashes with the realities of trying to break into the comics writing field. When you're an unknown factor, and you know that the publisher doesn't know if your work will be any good or not, you want to try to avoid giving them a reason not to see more of your work. Telling him that it will cost him to see your work even if it is crap can be a quick way to turn him off. When you get to be a Steven Grant or Frank Miller, the publisher knows that you will turn out at least reasonably professional work, but when you are a Nat Gertler, with three sales and only one published credit to your name, or are one of the masses with nothing sold, that can't be assumed.

"Never work on spec. Publishers are there to take risks, they are not there to force other people to take risks for them."

— Steven Grant

Should the publishers offer to pay a kill fee for any work requested? Probably. However, the reality is that someone who is trying to establish himself in the field seriously risks queering a deal by demanding that. It's a gamble you have to take while trying for that elusive break.

Steve Gerber: You want to break into comics, you do spec scripts -- as *samples*, not on a made-to-order basis for a publisher who may use them or may not. No offense, but believe me, if you follow the latter route, you'll be marked as a fool and a drone very early on, and the publishers will continue to take advantage of you until the day you leave the field.

A day *they* will choose, by the way -- not you.

Grant: No, Nat, it *doesn't* clash with the reality of breaking into the comics business. Frank and Mark and Gerber and I weren't always professionals, and yes, we had to do samples to get work (well, actually, I didn't, but mine was a most strange situation), but once a publisher or editor decided to offer us work, he/she didn't say "and if we like it, we'll pay you." When an editor hires you to work on an already existing title -- in most cases, under work for hire -- that means he's ready to pay you for the job. If he doesn't like the job, he has you redo it until he *does* like it. But under no circumstances should the work be spec, and any publisher who asks you to work for spec shouldn't be trusted and probably shouldn't be worked for. Period.

The subject of kill fees has been brought up in *WAP!* before, and we're about to bring it up again in specifically the context you're speaking of. But it's only because freelancers have been so hungry to break in that they haven't flexed their innate muscle and publishers have been able to get away with things like asking people to work on spec. There is absolutely no reason that condition should exist.

Mark Evanier: Nat, one of the reasons that Professionals are so uncomfortable when folks like you say, "Hey, you have to work on spec in order to break in," is this: When we go to Management and say we need a raise or better treatment, Management then responds, "Hey, we have kids lining up and working on spec to work for us... get lost."

And, of course, in the long run, that doesn't help you. Because if they can use that argument to get a Frank Miller a little cheaper, you're going to get less money.

I question the "need" to do spec work to break into comics right now; at least, the need to do spec work on characters the publishers own. It is necessary to get something in print in some venue... and that may mean working for a small publisher on low-profile projects.

spec, under the terms of the Guild contract. Which doesn't mean it never happens, of course. It does, and sometimes writers go along, but with no illusions: it's still wrong, the producer is considered slime, and if and when the writer gets a credit out of the job, it's a foregone conclusion he'll probably never work for that producer again.

Gertler: First of all, let me note that I have never actually done a full script on spec. I have done the first 8 pages of a 48 page work on spec, but that was in a case where I felt that I did not have samples that adequately reflected that sort of work. One proposal that I did do was as a full script, but it was my decision to do it that way.

I do plot proposals for existing books on spec. At this point, if I were a publisher, I would have some doubts about my ability to do certain styles which I have not already done, so doing plots on spec seems reasonable.

"'Never work on spec' sounds like a good ideal, but it clashes with the realities of trying to break into the comics writing field."

— Nat Gertler

But a lot of Writers have found out the hard way that coming into the business as an eager amateur, willing to work for nothing to break in, is a great way to get them to get them to not take you or your work too serious.

Evanier to Grant: Correction: I never had to do spec work to get into comics.

Gerber to Evanier: Nor did I, actually -- although I did take a six-page "writers' test" that Marvel used to require.

The point, though, and I think you'll agree, is that there's nothing wrong with writing spec scripts as *samples*. But not under the direction of a publisher. If that happens, the publisher's ethics have to be called into question immediately, and the writer or artist is setting himself up to be exploited for the rest of his career.

Evanier: Oh, sure. Folks desiring to break into TV or movie writing ought to do fair amounts of spec work. But that's a mite different from comics: For one thing, there are Guild-established minimums in TV and movies so beginners don't have to worry about pricing themselves too low. For another thing, there is an established history of the "spec" script in Hollywood and it doesn't mean quite the same thing here that it means in comics.

And there's not even anything wrong with writing original comic books and then trying to sell them... stuff you own. I guess a good rule of thumb would be that no one should ever be asked to write on spec but Writers should have writing to show, however they arrive at it.

Gerber: The only difference we have is in terminology. As Mark said, there's a history of "spec scripts" in Hollywood -- what those are, really, are sample screenplays and teleplays written by people who need to have "something to show" to an agent or a producer. Very common practice.

Producers out here, though, who are Guild signatories are, in fact, *forbidden* to ask a writer to work on

One thing that is different now from when you or Frank broke into the business is that we newcomers are not dealing with large corporations. Marvel and DC are showing greater and greater reluctance to deal with people who do not have established credits elsewhere, unless they come up through the editorial ranks. We are dealing with smaller, financially strapped companies who are in their own way even more conservative than the big two when it comes to taking risks. It used to be that those smaller companies were eager for interesting new names, but as the field slims down, they're finding plenty of known factors to fill their books. Independents don't want Matt Wagners and Bill Willinghams anymore; they want Mike Barrs and Art Adamses. Being an unknown, you already have a lot of strikes against you. They know that the name "Nat Gertler" isn't going pull in any sales (yet). Before they put any of their very limited money into you, they want to be absolutely sure that your creative output will be top of the line.

Gerber: If you choose to do spec work, though, that's your business. By "choose," I mean on your own initiative, not at the request of a publisher. There's nothing in the world wrong with writing eight pages of script (or 48) that way. If the publisher says to you, "Well, why don't you write up eight pages of stuff for me, and I'll see if I can use it..." you're letting yourself in for tremendous trouble.

What you don't seem to want to believe is that once they get that kind of favor from you, they *never* stop asking for freebies.

Grant: The bottom line is that it is not the place of the freelancer to subsidize any publisher. And if that kind of situation is going on, people ought to know about it beforehand.

Evanier: Nat, doing plot proposals for existing comics is probably the worst way to break into comic book writing today.

If you look at the list of writers who have "broken in" and begun to get steady work from DC and Marvel in the last few years, they are almost all people who distinguished themselves with their work on a book for a smaller publisher, usually on something of their own creation: Mike Baron on *Nexus*, Bill Loebs on *Journey* and then on *Jonny Quest*, Mark Verheiden on *The American*. The exceptions to this rule are usually folks who had a special "in" through a personal relationship with someone in a company.

Grant to Gertler: The problem with doing what you're doing to gain credits...

I don't know to what extent this continues today, but for a long time, Marvel didn't *care* what credits people have elsewhere, for the most part. They really didn't. They took the unofficial position that there were no comics companies but Marvel, except for DC, and only idiots would work for DC.

DC *may* haul in someone from other companies, but only if that person has made a substantial critical or popular success for themselves. And almost always artists, very rarely writers.

Frankly, if working for Marvel or DC is your goal, you're better off just forgetting about little companies and just canvassing the big two in Manhattan, trying whatever you can to get your foot in the door.

Christy Marx to Gertler: You should not have to work on spec. Prove yourself by large amounts of original work if you must, but there should never be a truly valid reason for working on spec. If your work doesn't speak for itself, if they aren't willing to give you some kind of guarantees, then you're just being jerked around.

Marx to Grant: No, I didn't do what I consider to be spec work to break into comics. I presented Roy Thomas with some samples and he gave me an assignment based on what he saw.

Gerber: Interestingly, once you've laid down the law with a publisher as to the kind of treatment you expect, it then becomes possible, and even desirable at times, to do them occasional favors without compromising your position.

Just the old saw about first impressions, I guess.

Gertler to Evanier: Actually, as much as I might like steady work from Marvel or DC, that is not either my direct aim at this point nor my long-term goal. The first step in my plan is getting some work wherever I can find it, hoping to set up a certain base level of credits. Second step is to get some small credits for the Big Two. The next step is getting my own series at an independent, possibly something that I would own. (I am not adamant on remaining owner of all my concepts. There are a couple that I will not sell, but most of them I would, given adequate compensation.) I don't view the second step as necessary for the third, and have already been circulating one series proposal (to lackluster response, alas). I am also trying carefully to establish non-adventure writing credits, so that I don't get typecast. However, at this point, I get my credits where I find them (and I discover myself finding possibilities in such odd places as a non-comics magazine and a food company). I also don't see comics as the only writing that I can do, or even the only writing that I want to do. It is, however, what I am attempting first because it is the medium that I know best and that I am most comfortable with my abilities in. (Sorry to be droning on with "The Great Gertler Scheme for Getting Out of Programming and Into Writing", but I'm just trying to make certain that I don't come across like a certain new Marvel artist I met the other day, who said "Well, all I really want to do is draw big muscular people punching each other, so I guess that Marvel is the only place for me" -- and he *meant* it!)

Evanier: "I am not adamant of remaining owner of all my concepts?"

That's great as long as you never create anything wonderful. If, however, you might create something that becomes a mega-hit, let me introduce you to a few friends of mine... Jerry Siegel, Joe Shuster, Jack Kirby, Joe Simon, Gardner Fox, Bill Finger... even a kid name of Gerber...

Gertler: Mark, I'm already working in a job where I am paid for a given piece of work, a piece of work that may be profitably used by the company for a decade after I leave. That doesn't bother me, because I know that situation, and feel that I am being compensated adequately. This isn't a Jerry Siegel case where someone is sneaking one by me, or a Steve Gerber case where I don't understand that I am signing something away. I weigh my potential long-term profit in the character, and the likelihood that I could make it a success without selling it, against the money being offered. If I think that I'm getting a good deal on that, I take it. Otherwise, I don't.

I always assume that I start out with ownership of rights on a new concept, but like anything else I own (and this is really like an investment), I feel that I can sell it.

The works that have a lot of personal effort, a lot of depth, and what I want to work with for the rest of my life I won't sell.

So tell me what is so unreasonable about that?

Evanier: For a long time, the people who worked in comics didn't have the option of selling an idea. If you wanted to be in comics, you had to *give* them (not sell; give them) the idea. If you created a new character, you would give them the idea, you would get paid your normal rate for writing the first issue and then they could dump you, remove your credit, give the credit to the boss, whatever. You could wind up with no "long-term gain."

There was no other deal possible. They would not discuss it. If you created something that you felt proprietary about, something you wanted to retain full or partial ownership of, and you told that to the publisher, they would hang up on you. Or tell you that if you didn't give them all rights to the idea, you wouldn't work for the company any more in any capacity.

It actually was worse than that... folks getting blacklisted from companies for wanting total or partial owner-

ship... publishers trying to convince writers that only a company could legally own a character... it was pretty ghastly.

And even if there *had* been compensation for an idea, do you think the Marvel of 1961 could have afforded to pay Jack Kirby a fair price for all rights to his interest in *The Hulk?* Do you know how much money a "fair price" would have been? What would have been a fair price in 1938 to pay Siegel and Shuster for all rights to *Superman?*

It is a fact that the only reason comic book companies are now willing to make profit-participation and creator-ownership deals at all is that that's the only way they can get the top creators. And if they start getting good characters under the old deal, it'll be that much easier for them to rollback the new terms they've grudgingly agreed to, these last few years.

***

This is M.E. again, back live. The conversation on the bulletin board went on that way for a few more weeks. Ultimately, the sense of the board was this: A professional should not be asked to work on spec, to invest his/her time in work that will be wasted if one publisher or one editor says no. And it is not all that great an idea to do this voluntarily.

And ultimately, it comes down to a question of, like Steven Grant mentioned above, not subsidizing publishers. They have their properties that they own outright. If you have a cut of the character, some reason to invest in its long-term future, that's different. But the folks who own the comic should be the ones undertaking all financial risk. The established rates in our field are not so overwhelming that anyone should have to gamble to get them.

This whole matter of spec work disturbs a lot of us. There is no question that a number of advances have been made in the comic book field in the last ten years in terms of better and more ethical treatment of writers and artists and their work. And a lot of us feel that every major accomplishment in comics of late, be it financial or creative, would not have happened but for these advances.

Moreover, a lot of us have seen the Passion of New Talent often manipulated to get that New Talent to work on spec; seen that burning desire to write a certain character or draw for a certain company utilized to get the New Talent to sell itself short. The disillusionment phase, when it comes -- and it *always* comes -- is truly sad and is doubtlessly fodder for another *WAP!* piece in your future. But for now, let me just allude to a long heart-to-heart I had the other night on the phone with one of the most talented "new" artists this field has. To get into comics -- to get onto the books he always dreamed of drawing -- he did a lot of freebie auditions, submitted tons of "proposals" for the company's characters. Now he is starting to feel that he is undervalued; that his passion was used against him and that he is in not nearly as "family" an environment as he once thought comics would be for him. He thought of all that spec work as a way of buying his way onto a certain book he craved... but the assignment has gone to someone else who was, the company felt, more of a "catch." Not a pretty story... and the artist, who never wanted to do anything *but* comics is starting to think otherwise. And he also thinks he should have been paid for all the audition pieces he did at the urging of the Editor.

We chatted about all this on the bulletin board and then someone felt it should all be shared with the *WAP!* constituency so I agreed to write it up. On assignment, not on their approval.

And I am being paid the full *WAP!* going rate... which is nothing. But that's okay. The point of all this is not that we want money, gang... but that we want what we do to be treated with worth by those who employ us. The fact that we create it out of thin air doesn't mean it doesn't cost us anything.

In fact, if what we do has any worth at all, it costs us *plenty.*

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Anyone with a computer and modem can participate in WAP! roundtable discussions. Call The Writers' Exchange Bulletin Board at 818-848-7898 and register for the WAP! conference.

Back Issues

#1 (April 1988): The Trial of Friendly Frank's, Geppi/Sim Part 1, Marvel's Back-of-Voucher Agreement, the Statement of Intent. Illustrations by Aragones, Bissette, Miller, Siencewicz.....$2.50

#2 (May 1988) Geppi/Sim Part 2, Christy Marx vs. The Censors, Darrow artwork ripped off, None Dare Call it Payola, Stevens Slimed, . Illustrations by Anderson, Bissette, Darrow, Miller.....$2.50

#3 (June 1988) Diamond/Aardvark War Ends, Askwith on Canadian TV, Staff Infection, Waiting for Giordano, The Anti-Voucher Agreement, Aircel vs. Creators, The Politics of Cowardice (Bissette), Part 1, Comics Lexicon. Illustrations by Laird, Miller, Zulli.....$2.50

#4 (July 1988) The Siegel and Schuster Affair, Gerber on Truth, Justice, and THe Corporate Conscience, The Politics of Cowardice continues, Illustrations by Bissette, Miller, Sim $2.50

#5 (August 1988) Mike Barr on the DC Silver Age Purge, the new DC Deal, Blackthorne and the IRS, The Freelancer is Always Wrong, Bissette continues. Illustrations by Miller, Sim.....$2.50

WAP!, 1879 East Orange Grove, Pasadena CA 91104.

Send letters to:

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Pasadena CA 91104

All opinions expressed in letters are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of this newsletter or its editors or publisher. All comics freelancers are invited to air their views in WAP!

Dear *WAP!*,

The articles by Sim and Moore are perfect complements to each other. I was rather surprised to find Sim the informative one, and Moore the hilarious one, though. I figured it would be the other way around.

But how many people are going to seriously consider their points? Sim's not going to offer a "we'll carry the costs until you show a profit" deal to most people. Moore is, let's face it, a fairly safe bet. So was *AARGH!* (Did I put enough A's in there? Sufficient exclamation marks? Yes? Good!) In a sense, neither of them had a *huge* risk.

I do wish I could have seen Frank's penis, though.

Self-publication is scary in any field. I have the money to take the risk, and never have. I wonder if it might be worthwhile for a group of creators to band together into a publishing consortium like United Artists (as it was originally). For that, you need a number of risk-takers. But you also have a greater possibility of success.

In a sense, when I read *WAP!* you're preaching to the converted. After being on both sides of the game in *other* genres, I know all too well that publishers are a problem, have a problem and love to invent further problems. What other role have they? Okay, so that's a little naive, perhaps even cynical. But that's also how it is. When I was an editor, all the publisher wanted from me were new and inventive ways to screw our few, poorly paid freelancers. We never got along too well, that publisher and me. Probably because I knew he was busily hobnobbing with the sales staff, searching out new and inventive ways to screw over the editorial staff.

Some people, I think, are making the mistake of looking at *WAP!* in search of that mythical beastie "objective journalism." *WAP!* is an advocacy journal and a source of useful information for comics and cartooning freelancers. It's been needed for a long, long time. Who knows? Given enough time, comics might even graduate to (gasp!) agents! Or even (dare I suggest it?) unions!

Yours,
Alex Krislov

Steve [Skeates]:

I've read the letter you sent to Wap.

To begin with your most easily refutable misstatements: We have cancelled checks which prove you were paid for everything you sent me on the Totem project, to wit: one plot and script for 38 pages, and one 20 page plot. If I read your letter correctly, you don't claim to have sent either a script for a second issue nor a third plot.

I don't know how you could have arrived at a figure of exactly $1833.40 by any reckoning. Your rate at the time was $45.00 per page -- $15 for plot, $30 for script. What kind of arithmetic makes any number of pages or plot or combination thereof at those rates total $1833.40? No matter, though. You got paid for what we received. No contract was broken.

Now, to the less concrete and far more painful matters. You write: "But it doesn't take an Einstein to figure out that the rule in question (stipulating that no payment can be made on new projects until a first issue exists in its entirety) had been on the books for some time but O'Neil had either forgotten all about it or failed to find out about it in the first place." Even were that true -- that an editor relatively new to the company didn't know about a rule which he was encountering for the first time -- it would hardly indicate the gross incompetence of which you accuse me. The truth, however, is that the rule was formulated at the time in question, but I got it waived, and you got money.

You write: "Over a year ago, I developed an idea for a series entitled 'Totem' and submitted it to DC. They liked the idea, made my old drinking buddy Dennis J. O'Neil my editor..." There are two factual errors in those sentences, and one nasty innuendo. You did not develop Totem--or, to be precise, you did not bring the idea to us. I suggested you come down to New York so we could develop something together, and thereby get you back in the writing-for-money business. For the better part of two days, we walked around Manhattan trying to work it out. I say 'trying" because my memory is that I did much of the talking and you did a lot of listening. (If somehow Totem had become a success, I think I would have felt a pang or two of envy, because I would have deserved at least half credit for it. But an editor's job is precisely to help freelancers, and so I would have let you take both kudos and dollars.) I wasn't "made" your editor. I initiated the project, and Dick Giordano okayed it because we both felt you might still be talented and because we both felt a remnant of an earlier friendship. As for being "your old drinking buddy": it's true that you and I did do a lot of juicing in the old days, but what you neglect to mention is that I stopped drinking years ago. Anyone who knows how I've struggled to remain sober will under-

stand how much I resent your implication.

About Totem: For a year, Dick and I kept it on DC's list of active projects, and submitted it to artists. Only two had any interest in doing it, and we rejected their samples because we felt they weren't commercial enough to give this inherently risky, off-genre series a fair chance in the marketplace. When, a month ago, I got a letter from you announcing that you were out of the writing business altogether, we were in the process of giving your script to yet another penciller.

About the "shrill and sanctimonious" audio tape: I won't argue shrill and sanctimonious. I won't even argue content because I don't remember much of what I said. I made that recording late at night, acting as a private individual, and, as I think is clear from the context, not as a DC editor. Context is important here: whatever I said was said in light of an acquaintanceship dating back 20 years-plus, and as a result of concern and a belief that your lifestyle was detrimental to you. It was addressed to you as an old friend – there's that word again -- and was not meant for any other ears. I was worried about you. If memory serves, that was soon after you had apparently vanished for five days, thereby violating our oral agreement that you make yourself constantly available for consultation on Totem; I'd spent a lot of hours calling everyone I could think of --Hama, Gerber, Mitchell, your roommate, your parents -- trying to learn where you might be after I'd heard reports of an alarming message you'd left. I wanted to assure myself that you were okay. I wanted to help if you weren't. Finally, I reached Mary Skrenes and she gave me the number of a bar where I ultimately located you. So then, I made a tape, pal-to-pal. I may have read you out for the vanishing act, or told you I thought you were messing up. I just don't know. I didn't keep a copy of the tape. I do recall making myself very vulnerable to you, admitting my own faults, fears and some deep pains I've spoken of to few people in my life. That you permitted anyone else to listen to those words is the worst betrayal I've ever suffered; that you used them as a target for public sarcasm is the reason I am no longer able to forgive you.

By the way, any dissemination of that tape would constitute a violation of copyright.

I've had to fire good writers and artists off assignments, always with much regret and only after in my admittedly fallible opinion I had exhausted other options. Sometimes, I've been wrong, and even when I haven't been, I don't blame these people for resenting me; I've probably been fired as often as anyone in the field and I know how much it hurts. But you, Steve – not only have I never fired you, off Totem or anything else, I've always tried to find work for you. Whenever I've gotten an editorial gig, I've called you, and once I used a contact I'd made as a reviewer to get something you'd written past a book editor's sludge pile. (In the end, you may recall, my effort was wasted; you didn't send the manuscript.) For the past decade, I feel it's been a losing game – to me, you don't seem able to function as a professional any more – but I've continued trying. I've also on occasion fed you and sheltered you at my own expense, and more than once that has damaged relationships with others. But I've done it because you were a friend and because I believed in your talent. I'm not so naive as to expect gratitude, but I did not imagine you'd ever attack me with lies and innuendos in print. I don't know why you did, nor do I care; there has to be a point at which loyalty, tolerance and even kindness stop.

You can probably rationalize your actions, and so live with yourself. I wish you the joy of it.

Dennis O'Neil
New York, NY

Dear *WAP!*

I received the first issue of my sub to *WAP!* yesterday and as much as I enjoyed reading it, I do have one minor complaint. The title of our comic mentioned by Dave Sim in his article on self-publishing is *Zolastraya and the Bard*, not "and the Band".

As Dave points out, self-publishing can be difficult when you're first starting out with your own comic book. It can be even harder if you choose to start your career in comics, because you not only have to establish a name for yourself in this field, but develop interest in your title and start a small business at the same time.

But it's the long-term investment of your time and effort that you must look at. The comparison by Kevin and Peter to the difference between buying or renting a house is a very practical example. Besides the artistic advantages of having control of your creative expression, you are wisely investing your efforts for your own (not some corporation's) financial future.

It must seem a step backwards for an established freelancer to give up lucrative page rates to start out on their own, but you would have the advantage of having a name in the business. It would be hard to imagine Alan Moore not being able to successfully self-publish a comic. Just think if he had gone that route with *Watchmen* when Dick Giordano told him he couldn't use the original copyrighted characters.

For a young person with potential to create new characters and concepts, it is the only way to go. Why sell off your ideas for a fraction of their future value for the business thrill of working for Marvel or DC or anyone until they find someone younger and still willing to be exploited for their talent.

I've spent six years creating for work-for-hire and despite the millions of dollars the company takes in, I'm still living paycheck to paycheck. Ownership of your art and concepts should be the first thing a person should consider. There's nothing more frustrating than someone else having total control over the art that is rightfully yours. We might not be making much from self-publishing now, but someone is living very well off the work we did five years ago. The glut may have been a setback, but Dave Sim has had the right idea all along.

Terry Echterling
Keego Harbor, MI

Please accept our apologies for misspelling the name of your comic.

Dear All,

I would like to add to the growing list of phrases of which freelancers should be wary. I issue this warning not only from my own bitter experience, but because I have heard of others experiencing the same incident from the same people, which leads me to believe that what happened to me was not an isolated incident (or a paranoid delusion). I also don't want it to happen to anyone else.

The phrase is, "We have something like this in the works." If you ever hear this phrase or words to that effect, grab all copies of your proposal and run!

Here's what happened: I had what I believed to be an original idea; a project that would not only benefit me as a freelancer, but would help to promote a certain company's entire line and provide some fun freelance work for a whole slew of people. I worked for about a week (in between other, paying assignments) and created what I thought was a handsome proposal package. I wanted to, on a freelance basis, oversee, write and otherwise edit and direct the project. I went through all the necessary steps and made a luncheon appointment (where I picked up the tab) with the editor responsible for such projects.

I presented my package and, after a brief discussion we went back to the Editor-In-Question's office. The editor spoke in glowing terms about the possibilities my proposal offered. Then, after musing silently for a while the editor leaned back and said (here it comes), "We have something like this in the works."

At this point in time I had no reason to suspect anything. Most of our discussion was positive and the Editor-In-Question seemed anxious to pursue the project further up the chain of command. I left a copy of my proposal and departed, expecting to hear from the Editor-In-Question in the near future.

Many months rolled by. The next thing I saw, in a copy of *The Buyer's Guide*, was a description of a project from the Company-In-Question remarkably similar to the one I had proposed. I immediately got on the phone to the Editor-In-Question who said, "Oh, remember I told you they had something like that in the works?" I had to admit that yes, I did indeed remember that phrase. As far as the Editor-In-Question was concerned, the matter was over.

Then I got to wondering. 1) Wasn't it an amazing coincidence that our thinking ran so parallel? 2) If our ideas had come about so close in time and so close in concept, why wasn't I called in to at least work on the project that the Company-In-Question "had in the works"? 3) Why was my proposal package never returned or further acknowledged?

When I heard of similar incidents happening to others I formulated a procedure to make sure such a thing never occurs again:

1) Once any freelancer completed a proposal package, have it notarized.

2) Make a second copy of the proposal to keep in your files and have it notarized, too!

3) If, at any time during your discussion, the Editor uses the phrase, "We have something like this in the works", ask to see the Company's material in question. Since you have presented your private project and idea to the Editor, he or she should have no problems with showing you preliminary material (if it exists at all) having to do with the Company's project. After all, it's no longer a "secret project," since the Editor has, in so many words, already told you it's similar to your idea. Any up front and honest Editor will gladly show you the material. This is for mutual protection. This way you'll both know that the project won't show up on the doorstep of another company without someone getting in trouble.

4) If the Editor refuses to show you any material regarding their project "in the works," point out the notarization of your project and, in as friendly a manner as possible, tell the Editor In Question that you've done so for your protection. Any up front and honest Editor will respect you for your honesty and professionalism.

I believe the reasons behind such occurrences are because of contacts with certain creative people. If a Company has a contract of X number of pages per year for Y creative person, they don't want to add freelancer Z and his project to the payroll. It's cheaper just to reorganize Z's idea a bit to make it look like their own and give the new project to Y, providing he or she with needed contract-fulfilling pages. They then say good-bye to Z and tell them "Don't call us, we'll call you."

Sincerely,
Jack C. Harris
Toms River, NJ

Dear *WAP!*,

While Dave Sim's article was full of useful information, it also seemed to have an attitude that the way that Sim has done it (and, we should note, no one else has, to that degree) is the only way to do it. He leaves out many options in his scheme of things, including co-publishing and doing creator-owned work for an independent.

Moore's article was very nice, particularly because he reflected the occasional realities of being on the business end (the whole "get rid of Frank [Miller]'s penis" issue). However, it should be noted that *AARGH!* was only marginally self-publishing, since Alan only did one portion of a fairly sizable comic. (Creator-spearheaded anthologies seem to be an interesting place to be these days, between *AARGH!* and the forthcoming *Taboo* and *A-1*.)

It was nice to see an issue of *WAP!* that was coming out *for* something rather than just against everything. I'm still trying to get used to *WAP!* not being what I expected it to be, and this issue is a great help.

Yours,
Nat Gertler

Dear *WAP!*:

I've read and enjoyed Steve Bissette's excellent overview of censorship, "The Politics of Cowardice." Thanks for publishing it. I agree with most of what Steve's said, but we part ways on our evaluations of the MPAA system for rating movies.

Several years have passed since I wrote "Bitter Harvests" for *The Comics Journal*, advocating a similar system for rating comics. Since then I've followed the devotees in *Comics Buyer's Guide* and other publica-

tions, sat on a couple of anti-censorship panels, and listened to the industry pundits debate ratings, labeling, censorship, etc. vociferously and, at times, eloquently. My current feeling is against any such rating system.

First, the voluntary, self-rating system I advocated (in which publishers would rate their own books according to published, industry-wide guidelines) would never work. I've watched comics publishers try to hammer out much simpler cooperative efforts and the spectacle has never been an encouraging one. Any rating system would have to involve an independent board with powers and a bureaucracy similar to the MPAA, and given the general capriciousness and too-frequent pettiness of the comics industry, that thought makes me shudder.

Secondly, I've developed an attitude of, "Until they holler for it, don't do anything." The mandate has to come from the people in the front lines, the retailers. Their attitude, as I read it, is, "Let us know what we're ordering and we'll do the rest." As long as they're content with that, so am I. So, in publishing Harlan Ellison and Richard Corben's *Vic And Blood*, I don't even put a "mature readers" label on the cover; same with Ted McKeever's *Eddy Current*. Both projects seemed very "self-selecting" to me; they didn't look at all like children's or superhero comics and I didn't figure anybody would be confused by them. Nobody's complained so far.

Movies are a different matter. They're firmly rooted in the mainstream culture. They typically range from children's to adult fare. And they are bird-dogged continually by pro-censorship forces. Society will not allow "nothing" to be done regarding possibly offensive movie content. "Something" will be done and the MPAA rating system, while not perfect, is the least censorious system I know of. Set the Way Back for twenty years ago and let's peek in on 1968.

According to MPAA President Jack Valenti, as reported in *Daily Variety*, local film classification boards were already in place in Chicago, Memphis, and Maryland when the MPAA system was established. Bills had been introduced in many state legislatures to create similar review boards across the country, as empowered by the Supreme Court. If George Romero hates dealing with a single, industry-sponsored review board, I can just imagine his delight with fifty state-run review boards, each with its own set of guidelines, local (potentially Fundamentalist!) members, and the authority to prohibit the showing of films they found objectionable. Since establishment of the MPAA system, all such local boards have fallen by the wayside, successfully headed off by the movie industry's acceptance of self-regulation.

This being the twentieth anniversary of the MPAA system, *Daily Variety* published some very interesting statistics about the board and its ratings.

The board has, in twenty years, rated 8326 films. Of those, 216 of the ratings were appealed. That's 2.6%, meaning that 97.4% of the movie producers got exactly the rating they wanted the first time around. So 97.4% of the time, producers got what they wanted, distributors knew what they were distributing, theater owners knew what they were exhibiting, and moviegoers knew what to expect by way of possible objectionable content before they plunked down their admissions. That's an absolutely remarkable success rate.

Before I toss out a system that works perfectly well 97.4% of the time, I want to know that whatever replaces it is going to work 98% or 99% or 100%. Replacing it with "nothing" isn't an option: moviegoers, exhibitors, and distributors demand "something." If Steve or anyone else has an alternative, I'm anxious to hear about it.

We have to keep in mind that theater owners and distributors are part of America, too. They have the same rights as the rest of us. It would be fascistic to tell them that they had to exhibit or distribute films they didn't want to carry. (And who would do the telling?) Exhibition of every film in every theater on demand of the producer or director isn't a constitutional right. If the filmmaker has the right to say to distributors, "Fuck you, I'm not having my film rated," then distributors have the right to say, "Then fuck you too, we're not distributing it." Exhibitors have the same right. Exhibitors and distributors have established a system that works very well for them and naturally they'll look twice at any single picture that threatens their livelihoods, at any individual filmmaker who wants the benefit of their services but demands them on his own terms. I'm sorry that, for example, Stuart Gordon's *The Re-Animator* didn't receive the distribution it deserved -- I think it's a terrific movie, a modern classic of the genre -- but I don't believe it's worth trampling the constitutional rights of distributors and exhibitors to give any single movie a boost at the box office.

If there is some way to preserve the constitutional rights of all parties and to guarantee maximum exposure for every film, I'm all for it. Obviously, the MPAA system has its flaws and its censorious element. But I haven't heard an alternative yet that doesn't leave the industry vulnerable to major, across-the-board censorship in the hands of government officials, or, God forbid, religious zealots.

But so far comics distributors and retailers aren't crying for a rating system and I wouldn't want them deciding how to rate comics anyway, so why ask for trouble? No rating system for comics. That's my current stand on the issue.

As a side note, I think it's pretty pathetic when comics are marketed, as some are, on the strength of their violence and gore (as opposed to the more illusive aspects of action, drama, suspense, and genuinely disturbing horror), but since all of American society is descending into a shithole of brutality, it doesn't surprise me that comics publishers are generally failing to buck the tide.

The views of *WAPI*'s reading public are invited.

Best regards,
Jan Strnad
Hollywood, CA

An Open Apology to Carl Potts:

In *Words and Pictures!* #6 I wrote "A Brief Story About Respect." This

story was born of frustration and anger toward the "money versus art" controversy currently being waged in the comic book industry.

In the name of artistic integrity I sought to aggrandize myself in a public form on a matter best kept private, and in the process I inadvertently hurt someone I consider a friend.

So, in the name of friendship, I publicly and personally apologize to Carl Potts for not extending to him the respect he deserves, and for the pain my insensitive story brought him.

Brent Eric Anderson
November 1988

Guys,

When I read about *WAP!* in *CBG*, I passed it by. It didn't sound like the kind of publication I'd be interested in. Having dreamed of being a comic artist nearly all my adult life & a good part of my adolescent life... I just didn't want to hear the bad side of things. I figured I just wanted to get in the door and let the bad stuff take care of itself later. Even after a bad experience with a small press publisher, I still didn't want to know both sides of the scene. By chance, a writer friend of mine sent me an issue.

The end of this story is, of course, I'm now a subscriber & vocal supporter of *WAP!*. You are all to be commended for the courage it take (& also the anger) to publish this in spite of the potential backlash you may personally suffer. (Have you suffered any backlash yet?)

In the two issues I've read so far... I wouldn't go so far as to say I've grown up but I will say it's been the spark that opened up my eyes to something I thought I didn't want to see. Whew.

It seems all of us have to go through that starry-eyed period where we can be easily stepped on. I've been through it, I'm sure nearly everyone has or will go through it. Sometimes ya just want something so badly ya shut yer eyes to the shit, ya know?

I'm wondering -- mostly because it's a situation I'm in right now -- if a small press black and white publisher agrees to hire me to pencil a book... and they send me the script and character descriptions... at what point do I ask for a contract? Should I ask for a contract? Should I ask for a check when I turn in the pages? Would that be considered a discourtesy? But then I don't want to be pushy, but then SHOULD I be pushy?

Again... thanks for being there with *WAP!* Much success to you!

John Dennis
Pontiac, MI

Don't "ask" for a check when you turn in work. If the publisher uses a standard voucher form, fill it out and include it with the pages you're submitting. If not, attach an invoice to the pages, billing the publisher for the amount you (hopefully) agreed upon before beginning the work.

Dear Brad:

It's good to see that someone has started a publication for comix pros, semi-pros and dedicated amateurs. There's been a need for same for too many years. I have nothing against the plethora of fanzines that came into being over the past twenty years. But it seems to me their number is far more due to the profit motive than the genuine need for that many of them, all busy duplicating one another and fighting senseless feuds.

I have a couple of pieces of information about my present activities which might prove worth reporting in *WAP!*.

First, I will be teaching a course in writing for comix and other visual media at The School for Visual Arts, here in New York. It's a well-recognized school for people planning a career in commercial art. I know that there have been a lot of courses in comix writing around the country. But they've either been individual classes run by a pro, or classes in unlicensed and unrecognized schools specializing in comicbook production. I think this is the first such course in a widely recognized school and thus, in its small way, helps to add further legitimacy to a field that is still fighting to be accepted as a bona fide medium of communication alongside films, books, etc. The course begins this coming Spring. Further information can be gained by writing for their catalogue: *The School Of Visual Arts, 209 East 23rd Street, New York, NY 10010.*

Second, I have left my post as National Executive Director of the Veterans Bedside Network to help form a new organization, The Veterans Living Theater. My plan is to spend the first year or 18 months in conducting the productions involved and then, having learned from that experience, to go about the country setting up perhaps four or five such units run by local people. All of this is dependent upon our raising sufficient money (isn't everything?). Right now we have 20% of our first year's budget. But we haven't sent out a single press release yet, so it's a bit early to start worrying. I can't think of a more important area of social concern, including AIDS and The Homeless, because drug addiction (the subject of Veterans Living Theater) is deeply involved with both of those.

Finally, I received a phone call a few weeks ago from a British film producer who is interested in making a film out of the Deadman character. He assumed, since I created it, that I owned the rights. After I explained the conditions that prevail in comix and made the usual jokes ("I thought Abe Lincoln had freed all you chaps!") he said, "Well, why the devil don't you get the rights?" So I instructed my attorney to be in touch with DC and see what it would take to free my "baby" from Ol' Massa up in de plantation house.

(Incidentally, I checked out the producer and he is legit. The reason I spent the cost of a few calls to England is that experience warned me that anybody who advises you to get the rights and then come back and deal with him, instead of going around you to steal the rights for himself, can't be a legitimate producer.)

I leave you with an ancient benediction which I made up about thirty seconds ago: may you live long enough to catch a taxi on a rainy day in New York.

I know of no better guarantee of eternal life.

Cordially,
Arnold Drake
New York NY

WORKERS UNITE!!

Frank Miller, Steve Gerber, and Steven Grant have joined forces to create an up-to-the-minute, irreverant, and *honest* newsletter especially for comics freelancers, with contributions from major writers and artists in the industry, including **Alan Moore, Bill Sienkiewicz, Dave Sim, Stephen Bissette,** and many, many others.

Join them! Subscribe to *WAP!* now at the charter rate of $25.00 a year. That's a break-even, no-profit rate, for freelancers *only*. *

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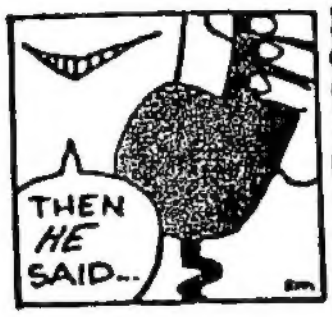
*1 year/$25.00 rate is available to established freelance professionals only. General public rate is $45.00/year. The rate for full-time employees or executives of publishing companies is $95.00. Rate qualification is the decision of the WAP! Editorial Board.



RUMORS AND INNUENDO

"EASY MONEY" Dept.: Acquisition fever rages on! Ronald Perelman, The president of the Revlon Co. (that's right, the make-up firm) working through a holding company called the Andrews Group, bought Marvel Entertainment Group (*sans* the notorious dead dog, Marvel Animation, which remains with New World Pictures) for a reported whopping $83 million dollars. Though inflated is a mild description of that assessment of Marvel's value, Perelman has a reputation as a hard-as-nails, royal-son-of-a-bitch businessman, and he may have something in mind. Current scuttlebutt coming out of Marvel indicates Perelman plans no major changes in the company, and all sub-groups like Epic and Ad Astra have been promised continued existence. Word is that Perelman was *especially* interested in the high-end product -- hardcover graphic novels and reprint collections -- and has quietly given Marvel a mandate to seek out new audiences and new markets, to boldly sell where no comics have sold before. Other than that, it seems business as usual, with no impending management shake-ups or reorganization... An interesting side rumor is that New World retains first refusal to make movies or TV of Marvel characters new and old, which would effectively cut Marvel out of the currently profitable film options racket... Our prognosis: look for status quo and an even greater flood of Marvel product, especially the very high end material... Expected effect of the sale on the freelancer: negligible. There's always the possibility that Perelman will consider all the penny-pinching measures New World discussed during its ownership of Marvel -- eliminate incentive payment and medical coverage for freelancers, move more work in-house and eliminate additional freelance pay for writing and art assignments done by salaried staff personnel, cut page rates and drastically raise prices -- but probably Marvel will manage to convince Perelman that these moves would be suicidal... (Speaking of which, the rumor persists that several months ago, former Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, as point man for a German publishing conglomerate, tried to buy Marvel and was soundly shot down by Mike Hobson and Jim Galton, who are said to have had veto power over sale of the company... According to one story, Jim went up with a hit list of people he'd fire in the event of purchase, which included practically everyone... If anyone has some real poop on this one, we'd love to hear it...)

"SPEAKING OF MARVEL" Dept.: We don't know any more about this than we print here, but the rumor's going around that a **HIGH-RANKING MARVEL EMPLOYEE** has quietly confided to at least one **VERY POPULAR FREELANCER** that Marvel is "taking steps" to convert its notorious "incentive" program for an actual royalty system that would legally require Marvel to pay a portion of profits to the creative personnel on a book. **POPULAR** says he's not holding his breath... And while we're on the subject, why aren't there royalty payments going for colorists and letterers as well as writers and artists? Colorists and letterers have enormous effect on the ultimate visual appeal and salability of titles, even if it's more subliminal than that of pencillers and inkers ...

"WAITING FOR THE MAN" Dept.: Now that the sale of Marvel has severed the company's ties to Hollywood, Stan Lee is no longer head of Marvel Productions, and the rumor is he's returning to Marvel Comics in an as-yet undecided capacity, most likely as writer of one or two books. Why writer? A management position would necessitate a move back to New York, and Stan is said to be dismayed by that prospect...

"HAND IN HAND" Dept.: This sort of "acquisition" has *everyone* bewildered: a deal for DC Comics to distribute Comico's books. The deal is financially beneficial to Comico, which has been straining under the weight of growing bills and shrinking sales for a year now -- if nothing else, we assume dealers will have to pay for Comico books under the same terms as DC books (but will this prompt dealers to pay quicker or simply order fewer Comico books?) -- but no one can figure out what DC gets out of it. A source quoted Paul Levitz as telling Comico publisher Phil LaSorda, "The industry needs Comico more than Comico needs the industry." (Sorry, you'll have to decipher that one on your own.) Is this the start of a kinder, gentler DC? Possibly... One industry wag speculated it was the DC management's way of sending a message to publisher Jenette Kahn's semi-autonomous pet, Piranha Press, that it's not the only fish in the sea... Another speculates this is DC's second salvo to co-opt the Independents (the first being the hiring, several years back now, of First editor Mike Gold, which may not have done First any good but didn't exactly cripple them, either)... At any rate, *some* freelancers working with Comico are taking a cautious view of the deal. One creator, doing a Comico title after a *long* affiliation with DC, said, "I feel like Patrick McGoohan. I think I've escaped the Village, but when I wake up the next morning I'm back." The deal specifies that DC has no editorial input in Comico books, and will only distribute them... but history tells us that distribution *is* editorial input...

"A PIECE OF THE PIE" Dept.: Suffering from their own bout of acquisition fever is Eternity Comics, now incorporating Aircel. It's said that Eternity personnel have been haranguing Capital City Distributors, the only distributor that regularly publishes market reports (the lack of competition in this area makes Capital's reports as authoritative as the field gets) to make sure that Capital now reflects Eternity/Aircel's larger "market share." "Market share" is this winter's big publisher buzzword, apparently on the assumption that it produces the illusion of profitability (though how a company struggling to achieve a 2% market share with seemingly hundreds of titles can be profitable, we'll never know). Noted financial fantasist and Eternity/Aircel mastermind Scott Rosenberg is said to be eyeing more independents, starting with Adventurers...

"DRAGGING THE LINE" Dept.: Seems Marvel's new standard policy is to delay contracts on graphic novels until work is well underway. Word from inside the company is that graphic novels suffer a high artist dropout rate, and since Marvel only does one contract per creative *team*, the legal department prefers to wait until they're sure an artist is going to finish the project. Unfortunately, this leaves the freelancer potentially at the company's mercy: If the artist or writer has any complaints when the contract finally appears, he either eats the work or caves in to the company's terms. Meanwhile, however, Marvel does seem willing provide those creators who ask with letters of intent that state the terms of the work. Our legal consultant informs us that such a letter is indeed binding... People who forever backburner their graphic novels while awaiting contracts (or for other other reasons) are, we're told, likely to find the project cancelled for non-performance... Part of the problem is that Marvel tends to treat graphic novels as long fill-in issues, usually with *no deadlines* specified. If deadlines, along with any penalties for non-delivery, were established and written into the contracts from the word go, a lot of this problem might go away... Whatever the reason for this situation, it's about time *all* companies -- not just Marvel -- started producing negotiated contracts *before* asking for any work, and about time freelancers started demanding contracts rather than digging themselves in deeper by giving away work while they "wait for the lawyers..."

"ROCKIN' ROBIN" Dept.: Remember all that publicity DC pumped out touting the "Death Of Robin?" Seems it had an unexpected side effect. The story goes that the reports came to the attention of Steve Ross, head of DC's parent co., Warner Communications. Ross was not pleased. Not only is Robin considered a major player in the expected sequels to the currently-filming *BATMAN* movie, but a number of merchandising deals hinge on the character as well. The upshot? The grapevine has it that Ross ordered DC to create a new Robin *immediately* (and *not* a girl Robin, as that would play havoc with existing merchandising), instead of waiting the planned year. Not only that, but Ross is also said to have taken exception to the "dark" Batman, which could jeopardize further merchandising of the hero, and has ordered DC to stop production on its forthcoming third *BATMAN* book, which was to have spotlighted the "dark" Batman. And Ross supposedly wants to see all Batman stories personally before they go to press, so that he can "protect" DC's character. True? Beats us. DC never tells *us* anything...

"OVERHEARD CONVERSATION" Dept.: **FREELANCER A:** "Is DC paying reprint fees on the *BATMAN* hardcover?" **FREELANCER B:** "I don't know. What's in it?" **FREELANCER A:** "Several stories Dick drew... that Bat-Mite thing Bob Rozakis wrote..." **FREELANCER B:** "Oh. Then DC's paying reprint fees..."

"DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS": We have to apologize for suggesting that DC might be losing money on *ACTION COMICS WEEKLY*. In fact, they're making so much money they were able to send writer Mark Evanier a royalty check for *penciling* the Green Lantern strip in an issue of *ACTION*. Okay, okay, the check *should* have gone to penciller Mark Bright. This isn't exactly out of the ordinary. Not long ago, Steve Leialoha got a check meant for Steve Lightle, and Don Newton once received Don Heck's check. And we hear that Alan Kupperberg and David Micheline are breathlessly awaiting their royalties on *WATCHMEN*... We'd also like to thank DC for finally removing the Greg Brooks Memorial Hammer from the office walls...

"I WANT MONEY" Dept.: Remember **WRITER X**, who's best known for a successful body of work at **THE BIG TWO**, but who also took over that **POPULAR SERIES** at **THAT MIDWESTERN COMPANY** about a year back? Seems that, despite generally good relations with **MIDWEST** that he hopes will continue for some years to come, **WRITER X** promptly joined the list of freelancers who have had a tough time getting paid regularly by **MIDWEST**. We heard he had to threaten to quit the book to get his account (which was then over 90 days late on page rate fees alone) up to date. Well, he finally collected that, as well as seven months worth of royalties, and while **MIDWEST** chalks the whole mess up to personnel changes in the accounting dept. (which neither explains the seven months of back royalties nor the other freelancers we've heard are still waiting to be paid), **WRITER X** has taken to calling the company when he's due a check and reminding them...

"DUCK, YOU SUCKER" Dept.: Gee, how things change. Back when all those people at Gladstone were fans, they constantly took Western Publishing to task for not giving Carl Barks credit on his work for Disney. Now that Gladstone is reprinting the Disney work, Barks's credit is there. But where are the credits of the many, many *other* people whose Disney work Gladstone is reprinting? Nowhere we can see...

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Lights Out

So far, *The Comics Journal* is the only place you can read about what may be the most important comics news story of the year. In an excellent article in their October 1988 issue, *The Journal* talks about an attempt to restrict distribution of *Brought To Light*, the new book editing by Joyce Brabner that illuminates aspects of the Iran-Contra Affair that might not be known to many Americans. Half of *Brought To Light* was written by Alan Moore and drawn by Bill Sienkiewicz, and the other half was written by Brabner and drawn by Tom Yeates.

Brought To Light was originally to have been co-published by Eclipse Comics and Warner Books, with Warners handling the bookstore distribution. At the last moment, Warners dropped out of the deal, forcing delays in the book (at this writing, it still has not come out), and in the absence of a bookstore distribution deal, forcing it into the relative obscurity of the comics shop. *Brought To Light* draws substantially on information unearthed by a Christian anti-war group called The Christic Institute for its civil trial against various players in the Iran-Contra arms deals who purportedly arranged a bombing in Costa Rica and tried to pin it on Nicaraguan Sandanistas. Parallel to the *Brought To Light* situation, the judge overseeing the Christic Institute case last summer threw it out of court for a number of bogus reasons that will easily be appealed. So easily, in fact, that it seems the only reason for the dismissal was to ensure that it wouldn't come to trial before spring. It was previously set to come to trial just before the November elections. Not coincidentally, one of the possible players in the Christic Institute case is president-to-be George Bush, whose ties to the Contra supply efforts and other clandestine operations has yet to be fully explored.

According to *The Journal*'s article, Warners' official reason for backing out of the project was that the dismissal of the Christic Institute's case opened the project to libel proceedings, despite the heavy involvement of libel lawyers throughout the entire project.

Other reasons cited include the political climate of the country, with the implication that Warners feared retaliation should George Bush become president. The pullout came following national publicity about the project. Communications between Brabner and Warner abruptly stopped, and Warner's personnel refused to make any comment to *The Journal*. (Going far beyond its usual scope, *The Journal*, in a perceptive sidebar, delineated connections between Warner Communications and organized crime, and between organized crime and covert government operations of the last 30 years, and implying possible collusion to shut down *Brought To Light*.)

Aside from the obvious political implications, why is this important?

The comics industry frequently speaks of opening up new markets and new audiences. The tacit assumption has always been that the same old material (i.e., comics as escapist entertainment) can somehow be reworked to draw in new demographic groups while not putting "the readership base" at risk. Clearly, this hasn't worked.

Brought To Light threatens to be a high-profile comics project. While it doesn't exactly break new ground -- Educomics has been publishing "comics of consequence" -- it, more than any other comic of recent years, could open up a whole new acceptance of the medium and father a new breed of comics. Given that books highly critical of the Iran-Contra Affair and those who participated in it, such as Leslie Cockburn's *Out Of Control*, are hardly unusual, there is the implication that whoever squelched the Warners-Eclipse deal was as afraid of the form as the content. Beyond the stifling of politically sensitive information, Warners' pullout from the *Brought To Light* project sends the message that comics are not to be regarded as the proper place for consequential or unsettling material.

It should be noted that the main effect of Warners' action was to cripple distribution of the book. Eclipse can easily publish *Brought To Light* without help from Warners, but they are now in the position of having to scrounge for bookstore distribution. If Eclipse or other comics companies were to extrapolate from this incident, they might decide that the risk of sitting on thousands of undistributable copies makes such adventurous project untenable. Potentially, distribution is editing, if distributors impose their personal agendas on the material they distribute. It's the job of distributors to work in league with the First Amendment, not against it, something Warners has, whatever their motives, clearly forgotten. Only when all ranges of content are "permissible" in comics will it be the medium we like to pretend it is.

At this point, we can only wish Joyce Brabner, Tom Yeates, Alan Moore and Bill Sienkiewicz luck in getting *Brought To Light* to the audience it deserves, and *WAP!* commends *The Comics Journal* for being the only generally available news magazine in any field to bring this story to light.

Next Issue:

Toward The End Of Work-For-Hire...a new column by Mark Evanier called *Ethical Questions*, featuring real life conundrums from comics publishing history...possibly the first colloquium on what freelancers really want...and lots more letters, news, and gossip...

Pushing the Envelope

We've put *WAP!* in envelopes this issue as an experiment, to see if more copies will survive the post office each month. If we can afford to keep doing it, we will, but we're still working out the money end of it, so the cost may be prohibitive. We'll let you know next issue how it works out.